

(c) and (d) Indebtedness due to high rate interest loans is a major cause for suicide by farmers. The Government of India has taken several initiatives in this regard. A comprehensive credit policy was announced by the Government on 18th June, 2004 containing measures for doubling of agricultural credit flow in next three years and provision of debt relief to farmers.

To reduce the interest burden of farmers, the Government has decided to provide short term credit to the farmers at 7%, with an upper limit of Rs. 3 lakh on the principal amount. Besides, an Expert Group has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Prof. R. Radhakrishna, Director, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, to look into the problems of agricultural indebtedness in its totality and suggest measures to provide relief to farmers across the country.

The Government of India has recently approved a rehabilitation package for 31 suicide prone Districts in the four States of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala, which, *inter alia*, contains provision for improved supply of institutional credit, debt restructuring and waiver of overdue interest.

(e) and (f) A Technical Group has been constituted consisting of Reserve Bank of India and State Government representatives to, *inter alia*, study/review legal framework and enforcement mechanism for money lending and similar activities in different states in the country and make recommendations to the State Governments to improve the legal and enforcement machinery for money lending and similar activity.

Government has approved a package for revival of the Short-term Rural Cooperative Credit Structure involving financial assistance of Rs. 13,596 crore.

Wheat production

†1797. SHRI BALAVANT ALIAS BAL APTE:
SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been a perpetual shortfall in wheat production in the country during last many years;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, the details of shortfall in wheat production during the last three years;

(c) whether it is a fact that with a view to maintain the foodgrain stock at required level Government have decided to import wheat; and

(d) if so, the quantum of wheat imported so far during this year and out of this the quantum of wheat that has reached the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) and (b) No, Sir. Production of wheat in the country during the last five years, i.e. from 2001-02 to 2005-06 does not show a perpetual decline. This can be seen from the table below:

Commodity	Production (Million Tonnes)				
	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06*
Wheat	72.77	65.76	72.15	68.64	69.48

*4th Advance Estimates release on 15.07.2006.

Wheat production shows a mixed trend. Year 2002-03 was a drought year which resulted in sharp decline in wheat production. Deficient rains from the South-West Monsoon during 2004-05 and abnormal rise in temperature in February 2006 in States of north-western region adversely affected the production of wheat in 2004-05 and 2005-06.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) 55 lakh tonnes of wheat has been contracted for import by the State Trading Corporation of India, out of which 35 lakh tonnes has reached the country. In addition, it is estimated that 6.6 lakh tonnes of wheat imported by private traders has also reached the country as on 01.12.2006.

Strengthening/Promoting Agricultural Information System

1798. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation is implementing a central scheme 'Strengthening/Promoting Agricultural Information System';